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THREE TEST STRIKES

The New Deal Administration finds itself faced with numerous strikes for the enforcement of rights that it had guaranteed to labor. Three of these strikes, representing all sections of the country, are fairly typical of the general pattern that nearly all are following: The Pacific coast strike of longshoremen and seamen which started on May 9th, tied up 177 ships in coast ports from Mexico to Vancouver and kept shipping at almost a standstill for 12 weeks; the truck drivers' strike in Minneapolis which stopped trucking in that city for 5 weeks in mid-summer; the general textile strike which brought out an estimated 500,000 workers in New England, several eastern states and the south. They all raise the same issues.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

Section 7A of the NIRA was hailed by church folk and others, who had long supported labor's right to organize by way of assuring themselves decent living standards, as the guarantee of collective bargaining. The strike stories show what is happening.

For the Guaranteed Right. Union recognition was the basic demand of the longshoremen who started the coast strike and of the seamen who soon joined them. It was made concrete in the issue of the hiring halls, the employer-controlled centers about which the workers gather and wait for the uncertain jobs. The Joint Strike Committee, which represented all of the maritime workers throughout the strike, held that this issue was a principle and could not be arbitrated. The chief demand of the Minneapolis truck drivers was for recognition of the "inside workers"—shipping and receiving clerks in warehouses and produce craftsmen such as celery trimmers, etc. These represented a new element unionized under the spur of the NRA guarantee. The textile workers demanded recognition of the United Textile Workers Union and reinstatement of all workers who had been "victimized for union membership in violation of section 7A" of the NIRA.

For Decent Living Conditions. Collective bargaining is not an end in itself. It is a means of getting and enforcing better work conditions. In each of the three strikes the workers were seeking higher wages and redress for grievances. Longshore work is casual and underpaid. Conveyors and electric trucks are the occasion of speed-up. The dockman must be on hand in the early morning and wait in all kinds of weather for a possible job. The hiring halls are centers of racketeering. Seamen are proverbially underpaid, overworked, subject to poor living conditions on board and often to unreasonable discipline. These were among the complaints of the Pacific Coast maritime workers. In Minneapolis a competitive produce market was able to force long hours and low wages on unskilled and unorganized "inside workers." There are reports of workers paid with damaged vegetables. The textile workers were the victims of the stretch-out (which means assigning more looms to a worker so as to get the same or more production out of fewer hours of work, i.e., it is intensified speed-up); code wages which were set at $13 for the north and $12 for the south and then reduced by General Johnson's curtailment order in June for a 25% reduction from the 40-hour week, which meant a 25% slash in earnings; and the tendency to force the maximum down to the minimum, so that the average (with large numbers below it) in June was $10.86 a week. Yet the administration had promised workers improvement in their living conditions and had given them to understand that collective bargaining would be a reality.

They Had Tried Government. The longshoremen had called their strike in March, but at the request of President Roosevelt had postponed it and submitted their demands to arbitration. Proceedings were still dragging on in May. The International Seamen's

Union had a long record of collective bargaining but it had been broken down by the Federal Shipping Board in the Harding administration. The union had recently presented the seamen's grievances to the Shipping Code hearings in Washington, the National Labor Board and the coast mediation board, all without result. The Minneapolis truck drivers had won union recognition and arbitration of wages as a result of a bitter strike in May. But in July "the agreement was still in the files of the Labor Board." The case of the textile workers had been before the Cotton Textile National Industrial Relations Board—over a thousand complaints on the stretch-out were submitted in the year beginning August 6, 1933. They had been turned over to the Code Authority—dominated by the employers—which had dismissed 40% of them without investigation and had interviewed about 600 employers on the stretch-out without getting a single adjustment. The strikes were a last resort.

A Record. Yet the administration has from the first set itself against the strike as a weapon in industrial disputes. In the early New Deal days President Roosevelt and General Johnson publicly warned the workers against using it. Resolution 44, passed by the recent Congress—the administration's substitute for the Wagner Industrial Disputes Bill—seemed to look toward compulsory arbitration. Only on Senator La Follette's insistence was the phrase inserted, "the right to strike remains intact." Now the President is asking both sides in the industrial struggle to lay aside for the present the weapons of warfare and to agree to mediation or arbitration by state or federal agencies. Yet the government has not enforced collective bargaining. The automobile and steel employers defied the National Labor Board from the start. Elections which the Board has ordered in various industries, to show which unions the workers want, have been postponed again and again or influenced by the employers. The National Labor Relations Board, which has now been substituted for the N.L.B., may only investigate, conciliate, not compel. The Longshoremen's Board, set up under the N.L.R.B., concerned itself with getting the coast strike settled rather than with enforcing collective bargaining. It tried to get the strikers to go back to work and then arbitrate—a well-known employer's tactic. The Winant textile board admitted the workers' grievances, but said it was not "feasible" at present for the U.T.W. to represent them before the industry as a whole.

Of what avail is it for either churches or government, or both, to proclaim the principle of collective bargaining unless it is to be enforced?

LAW AND ORDER

In the maritime, truck drivers' and textile strikes the employers' defiance went on alongside the mediation activities of government boards.

Employers' Offensive. Each of the strikes represented a showdown. The employers saw them coming and got ready. Back of the stevedoring companies, with which the longshoremen deal, and the great ship-owning companies, of which they are usually subsidiaries and which employ the seamen, were the San Francisco Industrial Association and Chamber of Commerce. These groups wanted an open shop city like Los Angeles. The big trucking companies of Minneapolis are members of the Citizens' Alliance along with the large banks, which may refuse credit to business men who make labor concessions. Trucking is basic in Minneapolis, a distributing point. The Alliance wants an open shop city, so the truck drivers must not be allowed to have a strong union. The big textile interests have found that their "sick industry" can make profits under the code if they keep their labor costs down. They are determined not to recognize the textile union.

Force and Violence. In each of the strikes the constituted authorities were on the side of the employing interests. In San Francisco Mayor Rossi augmented, by hundreds, the regular police force against strikers who were using the legal weapon of picketing. Police were used by the Industrial Association to carry out its threat of opening the port by force. The result was the all-day battle of Rincon Hill between police armed with clubs, guns and "a new vomiting gas," and workers using bricks, stones and bolts. Two strikers were killed and a hundred wounded. There were numerous lesser clashes in all of the port cities throughout the strike. Minneapolis police shot 45 picketers—in the back, as the Governor's investigation showed—killing two, when a strike truck swung alongside a decoy truck, by which the companies were testing—with the help of Mayor Bainbridge and Chief of Police Johannes' police force—the possibility of moving produce. In New England and the south, textile towns were converted into armed camps. Police and special deputies were armed with rifles, pistols, tear gas bombs. There were street battles, with shootings and deaths, in the Woonsocket-Central Falls-Saylesville area, R. I.; shootings and killings at Honea Path, S. C., Columbus, Ga., and elsewhere. In all, 13 textile workers were killed, scores wounded.

Martial Law. The Governors' contribution has been the calling out of the militia, in the name of "law and order." Rincon Hill gave Governor Merriam the occasion to yield to the employers' demand for troops to protect them while they moved cargo. He said it was to protect the property which the state owns along the San Francisco waterfront.

Farmer-Labor Governor Olson in Minnesota also brought in troops. He warned that this did not mean putting them at the disposal of local police authorities. But the result gave employers an advantage. Picketing was forbidden and strike activities curtailed while thousands of permits were granted to truck drivers, and many trucks moved without permits. Strikers were arrested and thrown into military stockades. No employers were arrested. Strike headquarters were raided by troops; so was the Citizens' Alliance headquarters later and the employers finally sought an injunction, unsuccessfully, to prevent the governor from continuing his use of troops). In the textile strike 8 states called out the militia. In Georgia Governor Talmadge established concentration camps into which helmeted National Guardsmen thrust men and women strikers. Carloads of heavily armed guardsmen battered their way through picket lines, clubbing and arresting strikers. (Martial law also brings the national government into the picture as troops are equipped by means of federal funds and are now sworn in as part of the federal forces.)

If a situation that begins in the failure of the Government to enforce its own guarantees to workers reaches the stage of force and violence, on whom does the responsibility rest? Why were these guarantees not realized?

"Red Menace." Also several governors, notably Merriam in California, Green in Rhode Island, and Talmadge in Georgia, abetted the cry of "the red menace" which was raised at once in each of the strikes and was used throughout to split labor's ranks. The Roosevelt administration also played its part. In California, at the height of the general strike, General Johnson made a public appeal to the labor movement to "run the subversive elements out from its ranks like rats." (Also Secretary Perkins promised the service of the Labor Department in the deportation of aliens,—deportation being part of the anti-red drive.) In the textile strike President Roosevelt in a personal telephone call told Governor Green (who had ordered the police to arrest every known Communist) that federal troops would be supplied if their help was needed.

Vigilantes. Private citizens also helped the employers. Hundreds of them were enrolled as vigilantes in the Bay cities of California. The American Legion had been active. A citizens' committee was closely allied with it. There were sub-committees, members of which were virtually part of the police department. An intensified anti-red drive got underway while General Johnson was calling the general strike a "bloody revolution." Mobs raided and wrecked the headquarters of left-wing organizations, destroying papers and equipment. The militia protected them and policemen followed, arresting hundreds of alleged Communists. Evidence has come to light that the Industrial Association had agents reporting to it the names of those arrested; also that it knew beforehand when the raids were coming off. The terror continued in these cities for days after the strike had ended. Workers were followed to their homes. There were assaults on men and women. "Purging committees" drove about the streets throwing notes tied to bricks warning "Communists, bolshevists, aliens, etc.," to leave the city. In Minneapolis the Citizens' Alliance was actively anti-labor and partly subsidized a Law and Order League. The textile strike has subjected hundreds of strikers in north and south to a reign of terror. They have been beaten, thrown into concentration camps, sentenced to long prison terms. The terror did not end with the strike.

The Role of the Press. The press has proved itself an open agent of the employers. In San Francisco it referred to strike leadership as "alien and subversive elements." It announced again and again that the strike was over while it was still on. During the hearings by the President's Board it carried the employers' side in full-page ads. Finally leading publishers got together just before the general strike and deliberately planned to split labor's ranks and alienate public opinion by playing up the red menace and calling the strike a revolution. The story has been told by a California newspaper man in *Editor and Publisher* under the caption "Dailies Helped Break General Strike." In Minneapolis the press is tied in with the Citizens' Alliance. When the strike threatened, the employers bought full pages and launched the red scare. The newspapers reported that 90% of the workers had never quit; that the strikers were "a small band of insurgents." The newspapers in the textile towns have also been largely on the employers' side. Also the press across the country has for the most part failed to interpret the strikes as labor's desperate effort to get what it had been promised and then denied.

Are these the earmarks of American fascism?

LABOR ELEMENTS

The assumption of those promoting the anti-red drives is that "outside agitators," "subversive elements," "aliens," are responsible for the strikes. But in each case the strikes were called by A. F. of L. unions—the International Longshoremen's Association and the International Seamen's Union, on the Pacific coast; General Drivers, Helpers, Petroleum and Inside Workers Local 574, in Minneapolis; United Textile Workers of America.

Rank and File Pressure. But the strikes were called under pressure of a rank and file that is becoming disillusioned about NRA and about A. F. of L. leadership. The de-

pression and the NRA guarantee have brought into the old unions, or into new ones, new mass elements. It was the new unionists from the southern textile mills that forced the convention of the U.T.W. to call the textile strike. In Minneapolis the truck drivers' union had recently grown to a 7000 membership largely by bringing in the "inside workers." There was a large rank and file farmer-labor element, with leadership more to the left. The I.L.A. in San Francisco had an active rank and file committee and left-wing leadership. Seamen were quitting their ships in sympathy with the longshoremen before the I.S.U. voted to come in. A left-wing industrial union, the Marine Workers Industrial Union, which includes both dockmen and seamen, and especially, in San Francisco, unemployed seamen, worked closely with the militant I.L.A. leadership and came into the strike early. This same line-up is present on the Atlantic coast where a strike of longshoremen and seamen is pending. In all the strikes, organized unemployed helped picket and demonstrate; and other unions struck in sympathy or otherwise helped the strikers.

A. F. of L. Officials. The A. F. of L. has had a part in the new unionization. Its unions have been carrying on organizing campaigns. Also in granting charters to "federal unions," i.e., industrial unions directly affiliated with it, in the hitherto unorganized mass industries—automobile, aluminum, radio, rubber, electrical, etc., it has helped on a trend, with which it is not in sympathy, toward industrial unionism. Craft vs. industrial unionism has become a burning A. F. of L. issue. The new membership is often critical of the old leadership. It offers good soil for education and propaganda. Communist and other left-wing unions take advantage of this situation. The A. F. of L. has now launched a new anti-red offensive. In each of the three strikes A. F. of L. officials lent themselves to the red scare. In each they had tried to head off the conflict and, failing that, they sought to lead it and keep it in control. President Ryan of the I.L.A. went up and down the Pacific coast negotiating agreements which the strikers angrily rejected. The San Francisco Central Labor Council officials were forced to call the general strike in answer to the movement of troops, because of rank and file demand; but they set themselves at once to end it. William Green of the A. F. of L. helped them by publicly deprecating the general strike as a weapon. President Tobin of the International Teamsters Union called the Minneapolis strike illegal. Vice-President Gorman of the U.T.W. used fiery language in interview and radio speech. But he urged the strikers to abandon the flying squadron and mass picketing for the folded arm method. And he hurried to broadcast as "victory" the Winant report. Now without consulting the workers he has promised the President that they will not strike for six months and that they will accept the decisions of the N.L.R.B. and the new textile board.

To Government Agencies Again. In each of the strikes not only have government agencies had a hand in "settlement," but the agreements themselves have called for further use of government machinery. This is in line with the New Deal philosophy of cooperation of government, business and labor. The A. F. of L. endorses the program and is tied in with the machinery. On the coast, with the general strike broken, the issues confused for the rank and file and the militant leadership in part in jail or under cover, the Joint Committee for the maritime workers finally had to submit the basic demand of control of the hiring halls to arbitration. The result has not yet been announced. The workers are complaining that the employers have not kept their interim agreement to dismiss all scabs and to take back strikers without discrimination. In Minneapolis the strikers won recognition of the "inside workers" (in the market area only) but had to submit to an election, by firms, under the Regional Labor Board, to see whom the workers would have represent them. This has given the firms a chance to influence and intimidate workers. Also the union has protested to Washington against the board's handling of the disputed cases. The textile strikers have been sent back to work (to the wretched jobs that myriads of them are now finding closed to them because they struck) with a promise of further investigations (under two more government agencies, the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Federal Trade Commission) of their wages, hours, and the stretch-out. But in each of the three strikes the workers have tested their power and later struggles are threatened.

Is the present leadership of organized labor and the type of organization it is seeking to perpetuate adequate for this new situation?

In the struggle between a rebellious rank and file demanding the right to live and comfortable union office holders unable either to lead or help them, where do the religious forces stand?

Sources. *New York Times, St. Louis Despatch, Minneapolis Star;* special articles in *Nation, New Republic* and *New Masses; Seamen's Journal;* San Franscisco *Labor Clarion; Western Worker;* Minneapolis *Organizer; The Militant; Daily Worker, New Leader, Federated Press;* Labor Research Association notes.

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